

The Contexts of Religion and Violence

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Terror at the Holy of Holies

Christians and Jewish Builders of the Temple at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century

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Introduction

[1] In August of 1969, a young Australian, Dennis Michael Rohan, set fire to the Al-Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount. Rohan was motivated by a desire to bring about the messianic age and thought that clearing the ground for the building of the Temple would set the apocalyptic clock going (see the explanations in his criminal file in the Jerusalem District Court, 69/173). Psychiatrists later diagnosed Rohan as insane, and many at the time chose to believe that the burning of the mosque was the act of an unstable fanatic. Since the 1970s, however, while only few have tried to damage the Temple Mount mosques, a number of Christian and Jewish groups have strived for the rebuilding of the Temple and some have even begun preparations for the reenactment of the Temple's ancient rituals. Their cooperation has brought about a new chapter in Jewish-Christian relations, inspiring unprecedented alliances and new visions on the part of Jews and Christians for the Messianic times. Rohan's setting of fire was the first act that highlighted the explosive potential of the Christian and Jewish messianic hopes. Of special concern for Israeli officials, as well as peace-hopefuls, in Israel and other countries, has been the possibility that people holding such beliefs might destroy the Muslim mosques on the Temple Mount and bring about a

regional doomsday. In order to appreciate the passion with which many Jews and Christians have wished for the Temple to be rebuilt, one has to examine the role of the Temple in Jewish and Christian thought.

The Temple in the Jewish Tradition

[2] The Temple in Jerusalem had been a central institution in Israelite religion, as well as in the Judaism of the Second Temple period. The books of the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible reflect a struggle on the part of the Judean spiritual and priestly elite to turn the Temple in Jerusalem into the one and only spiritual center in Judea (cf. Japhet). The destruction of the Temple corresponded with the collapse of Judea and the exile of Judeans to Babylon in the beginning of the sixth century B.C.E. When Cyrus allowed Jews in exile to return to Judea and rehabilitate their ancestral homeland, they rebuilt a temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem as a matter of course. Herod the Great further enlarged the Temple, reconstructing the Temple Mount and turning it into a plateau. For the Israelites and their Jewish descendants, the Temple served as the ultimate spiritual point on earth; the Temple was the place where heaven and earth met, and where it was possible for humans to atone for their sins in a definite and conclusive manner. The Temple guaranteed that Jews reconciled with their God, and therefore assured their salvation. Pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem were considered essential rites. They signified the Jews piety and loyalty to the one God “in the place where He had chosen to dwell.” During the Second Temple period, the Temple developed into a unifying symbol and center for the diverse Jewish community in Palestine as well as all around the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world. The destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. created therefore a serious vacuum in Jewish communal and spiritual life, and Judaism had to start a process of adjusting itself to a life without a temple.

[3] Instead of a temple, Judaism put its premium on sacred texts, turning itself into “the People of the Book.” Instead of a physical temple, Judaism promoted a “temple in time,” as the weekly Sabbath had become a holy day, similar in sanctity to a holy place (Heschel). Jews purified themselves in honor of the Sabbath and entered the holy day in the same manner they would enter a holy place, cleaning their bodies, wearing special Sabbath cloths, and preparing festive meals. They would light candles and recite special prayers. Moreover, Jews would act differently during the Sabbath, as people act in a holy place, with awe and piety, concentrating on sacred, spiritual activities and thoughts (Ariel 2005). Sacred time is global and can be celebrated anywhere. Likewise, texts could easily be transferred from place to place and be shared by all members of the community, provided they were literate. Synagogues, “houses of gatherings” in Hebrew, came about during the Second Temple period, and developed, after the Temple’s destruction, into the Jewish houses of worship and learning, where Jews prayed to their God and read the sacred texts. In their prayers and in their readings of the Torah, they re-encountered Zion and a yearning to see the country re-emerge as a Jewish kingdom and the nation’s sacred house of worship rebuilt (Reif). Ironically, while in previous centuries there were competitors to the national spiritual center in Jerusalem, after its destruction it became the one and only legitimate Temple to be resurrected in the fullness of time (Eliav). Jews prayed to God to gather them back to Zion, rebuild Jerusalem, and recreate the Temple so as to enable them to atone fully for their sins

and reconcile completely with God. After the destruction of the Temple, many hoped to see it rebuilt. In Jewish liturgy, the Temple is called: “Your [God] Temple,” “the Grand Holy House that Your name is given upon,” or “the Chosen House.” Officially, prayers in synagogues are offered in lieu of sacrifices in the Temple. At least until the nineteenth century when liberal Jews began reforming and rewriting the prayer book, synagogues services took place in theory because of the lack of a more effective means of approaching God in the Temple in Jerusalem.

[4] In spite of the fact that the Temple was gone, in the immediate generations after the destruction of the Temple, rabbis spent much time discussing issues relating to the Temple, its measures and sizes, its sacrificial system, and the alms and donations presented to it. Most rabbinical authorities from the Middle Ages to the present have viewed the Temple Mount as being as sacred as it was when the Temple was standing. The *Mishnah*, the post-Biblical compilation of lore and law, outlined the various degrees of sanctity of areas on the Temple Mount and the rituals of purification people needed to perform in order to enter these areas (*Kelim* 1, 8). All Jews have been required to purify themselves with the ashes of a red heifer before entering the Temple (see Numbers 19), and there are no longer red heifers to be found. Rabbis have also feared that Jews might step on restricted sacred ground, such as the Holy of Holies, onto which ordinary Jews, and even ordinary priests, were not allowed to enter. Most Jews have accepted the rabbinical ban and saw entrance to the Temple Mount as taboo. However, Jews had not much to say about the manner in which the Temple Mount was governed. Between the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and 1967, the Temple Mount was not ruled by Jews, but rather by Pagans, Christians, and Muslims. During Roman times Jerusalem became a pagan city, and with the Christianization of the Roman Empire, a Christian one. Following the Arab conquest of Palestine, in the seventh and eighth centuries C.E., the new rulers of the city have turned the mountain into a sacred Muslim site, building a number of mosques and chapels. While at the end of the eleventh century the Crusaders conquered Jerusalem and converted the Temple Mount mosques into Christian buildings, by the thirteenth century the mountain became Muslim again, and it has remained that way ever since.

[5] In 1967, Israel conquered East Jerusalem, which includes the Temple Mount. Many Israelis understood the outcome of the Six-Day War in secular messianic terms as validating Israel’s righteousness and the Zionist dream of creating a permanent commonwealth for the Jews in their ancestral homeland. The capture of the Temple Mount symbolized to secular Zionists, such as General Motta Gur, an ultimate victory, the realization of an old dream (cf. Oren: 245). However, most Israelis did not wish to rebuild the Temple (cf. Aran 1986: 118). The Temple Mount was a Muslim site, administered by the Muslim *Waqf*. Moreover, Judaism had moved a long way, since the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., from the kind of worship that had taken place in the Temple, and Jews had come to see the building of the Temple as postponed to a remote theoretical future. The Israeli Minister of Defense at the time, Moshe Dayan, designed a policy, which the Israeli government upheld, that insisted on maintaining the status quo antebellum on the Temple Mount as well as in other Muslim and Christian holy sites. It offered in essence autonomy to Muslims and Christians in handling their traditional holy places, including the Temple Mount. In line with the Jewish rabbinical law, a number of prestigious rabbis, including the chief rabbis Itzhak Nissim and Issar

Unterman, declared that Jews were forbidden to enter the Temple Mount (cf. Sprinzak: 2279-88). In 1967, voices, such as that of Rabbi Shlomo Goren, who wished to establish a synagogue on the Temple Mount, were in the minority. In sum, as far as the majority of Jews during the late 1960s were concerned, the rebuilding of the Temple was either to be avoided altogether or postponed almost indefinitely.

[6] When Rohan burned the Al Aqsa mosque in the summer of 1969, no Jewish group endorsed his act, or declared it to be in line with its agenda or with that of God. In fact, Israelis were astonished that there were Christians who wished to rebuild the Temple and were willing to make dangerous moves in that direction. Rohan's trial records reflect bewilderment as to the motivation for the crime he had committed. The mood in Israel changed after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, when small groups of Jews and Christians in Jerusalem organized to promote the rebuilding of the Temple. Paradoxically, external threats to Israel's territorial gains, whether through war or peace negotiations, have inspired Jewish religious nationalists to take a proactive stand and to further their cause to see the Temple rebuilt (Inbari).

[7] While the Six Day War of June 1967 created an unprecedented united front in Israeli public life and strengthened the government's authority, this was hardly the case after the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, when the authority of the Labor leadership weakened considerably, and the reputation of Moshe Dayan diminished almost completely. Ironically, it was in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War that the messianic excitement that followed the Six Day War came to the surface. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi describes the religious messianic groups that came about after 1973 as putting emphasis on public salvation instead of personal one (69-70). Thousands of young people, mostly modern Orthodox, veterans of the religious Zionist Bnei-Akiva youth movement, and disciples of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who became during those years the ideological leader of the Greater Land of Israel movement, decided to settle in Judea and Samaria, formerly the West Bank of Jordan (cf. Sagie and Stern). The Orthodox Zionist camp, previously a junior and peaceful part of Israeli society, became a radical wing of that society. The Settlers of the West Bank and the Temple Builders are not necessarily identical and most Settlers have not been particularly interested in the building of the Temple in an immediate way. Similarly, many of the Jewish Temple Builders are not Settlers. But the Temple Builders' movement share a great deal theologically and ideologically with the Settlers' movement (cf. Aran 1997). Since the 1980s, both movements have been part of Israel's Radical Right (Sprinzak), and one of the most volatile groups of Temple Builders came from the Settler's circles.

[8] In essence, in the mid 1970s the Temple Builders and the Settlers Movement have declared their wish, as observant Jews, to re-enter history as active participants, even if controversial ones (cf. Ravitsky). The new groups of Temple Builders reinterpreted Jewish texts and decided that the rabbinical ban on entering the Temple Mount was erroneous (Inbari). Moreover, they rejected the entire understanding that the building of the Temple should be left for the Messiah to accomplish at the Fullness of Time. The first visible group of Temple Builders, which attracted much media attention, was the Temple Mount Faithful. Led by Gershon Solomon, a disabled IDF veteran and a lawyer, the Temple Mount Faithful gave voice at its inception, in the mid-1970s, to a large variety of Jews interested in the building of the Temple. Among them were Orthodox and secular, Labor-supporters and

Right-wingers, Hasidim, and Mitnagdim. Its periodic attempts to enter the Temple Mount and organize prayers there have enjoyed much media coverage. But even within a small group a broad coalition could not stick together for very long and, far from the eyes of the cameras, other groups began congregating separately, studying texts, and publishing newsletters.¹ Some of these groups were preparing for the reinstatement of the sacrificial system in a rebuilt Temple (see Sprinzak: 264-69, 279-88).

[9] Settlers in the West Bank were one group that turned their backs on the Temple Mount Faithful and went their own way. Some of them created an underground and planned to bomb the Temple Mount mosques, resulting in their arrest and imprisonment. They did not lose their interest in rebuilding the Temple, even after their release from prison. In the 1980s, Rabbi Joel Bin Nun, a leader of the now defunct Gush Emunim, established an institute for the halachic study of the building of the Temple. In a series of publications he has pointed to the merits of the Temple and the sacrifices therein in reconciling God with humanity and bringing about a messianic age. Other groups that congregated during the 1980s-2000s, mostly in Jerusalem, have included: Jerusalem First (Reshit-Yerushalim), the Academy for Studying Jerusalem and the Temple, the Movement for the Building of the Temple (Ha Tnuva LeKibud ha Mikdash), the Temple-Laws Yeshiva (Yeshivat Torat HaBayit), Unto the Mountain of the Lord (El Har Adonai), the Movement for the Liberation of the Temple Mount (Ha Tnuva LeShihur Har HaBayit), and The Priest's Crown Yeshiva (Yeshivat Ateret Cohanim), to name just a few of the groups (on the scope and variety of these groups, see Shragai).

Christian Messianic Hopes and the Rebuilding of the Temple

[10] The Jewish movements that have strived to build the Temple would not have carried their activities the way they did if it were not for Christians sharing their hopes for the rebuilding of the Temple and providing encouragement and assistance. Like Jews, most Christians have had no wish to rebuild the Jewish Temple. In fact, Christian thinkers had traditionally seen the Temple as redundant after Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, and claimed that Jesus, the ultimate human sacrifice, had atoned for all of humanity's sins. One did not need sacrifices anymore, but rather one had to join the mystical body of Christ. Christians interpreted the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. as resulting from the Jewish unwillingness to acknowledge Jesus' role and mission. During the Byzantine rule of Jerusalem, the Temple Mount was neglected and even functioned as a dumping ground for the city's debris.

[11] The idea that the Jews should go back to Palestine and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple became predominant among Christian Messianic groups, which have often existed outside the mainstream of their tradition. A number of Messianic groups had come about during the medieval and early modern periods, and took interest in the Jews, viewing them as heir to the biblical Children of Israel (cf. Cohn). A resurgence of messianic expectations among Protestant Christians has taken place in the English-speaking world in the nineteenth

¹ I am thankful to Mrs. Pnina Pely, a veteran of a number of the groups, for sharing her collection of documents with me.

century. A school of messianic hope in which the rebuilding of the Temple has played a particularly important role is known as dispensational premillennialism. Serving as a philosophy of history, it has become part and parcel of the conservative evangelical Christian worldview, meshing well with the conservative outlook on contemporary culture. During the Cold War, dispensationalism provided hope and reassurance in the midst of pessimism over current events, as well as over one of the greatest fears of the time – the prospect of a nuclear war (cf. Mojtabai). Dispensationalism views human history as divided into eras, for each of which God has a different plan for humanity. According to the dispensationalist understanding, the present age is the penultimate era, while the last age is the millennium or the Messianic time. A special feature of dispensationalism has been the belief in a secret, sudden “rapture” of the Church. Dispensationalists expect the Rapture to be the opening event of the eschatological era. According to this scenario, the true Christian believers will be snatched from earth and remain in heaven for the duration of the apocalyptic period, which consists of seven years (or, according to some versions, three and a half years), at the end of which they will return with Jesus to earth to defeat Antichrist and establish God’s kingdom on earth for a thousand years. In this school of Christian eschatological thinking, the Holy Land, Jerusalem, and the Temple Mount serve as the arena on which the central events of the Great Tribulation are expected to unfold. Departing from traditional Christian claims, dispensationalists view the Jews as historical Israel, destined to play a prominent role in the events that precede the messianic kingdom (on the role of Jews in this scenario, see Ariel 1991).

[12] Even before the rise of political Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel, Christian proponents of the messianic hope in the Second Coming of Jesus expected the Jews to return to their ancestral land and build a Jewish commonwealth, “in unbelief,” without accepting Jesus as their savior.² They viewed that Jewish State not as the expected messianic kingdom, but rather as a stepping-stone towards its realization. Dispensationalist Christians anticipate the rebuilding of the Temple as part of the events that will take place between the end of the current era and the second coming of the Messiah to earth (see Weber; Boyer). During the Great Tribulation, Antichrist, an imposter of Christ, will achieve global power, rule Israel, and inflict a reign of terror on his people. For the Jews, that devastating period would be “the Time of Jacob’s Trouble.” This period of suffering will come to an end when Jesus returns with the true believers, who had been raptured from earth at the beginning of the period, to crush Antichrist and establish God’s universal kingdom in Jerusalem (see Jeffrey). At that time, the Jews will recognize Jesus as their Savior and serve as his right-hand people.

[13] The dispensationalist messianic hope, with its vision of the role of the Jews and Jerusalem, stands in the background to the Christian premillennialist interest in the developments in the life of the Jewish people, and especially in the building of a Jewish

² Among the better known Christian premillennialist books and tracts of the 1870s-1880s are William E. Blackstone’s *Jesus is Coming* and James Brookes’s *Maranatha: or The Lord Cometh*. Both books became premillennialist bestsellers, going through a number of editions and selling hundreds of thousands of copies. Such books have strongly emphasized the centrality of the Jewish return to Palestine for the coming of the messianic age.

national home in Palestine. Such events as the rise of the Zionist movement, the building of Jewish towns and villages in Palestine, the Balfour Declaration of 1917, and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, reinforced the messianic hopes of conservative evangelical Christians, convincing them that they have read the Bible correctly and that prophecy was unfolding according to the scheme promoted by the dispensationalist eschatological faith (see Davis; Walvoord). Of particular importance in this respect has been the Six Day War. In fact, no other event in the twentieth century stirred the Christian messianic imagination more than the short war between Israel and its Arab neighbors in June 1967. The unexpected Israeli victory, the accompanying territorial gains for Israel, and, most importantly, the Israeli takeover of the historical parts of Jerusalem, strengthened the Christian premillennialists' conviction that Israel was created for an important mission in history and was to play a vital role in the developments that were to precede the Messiah's arrival (see Bell). Following the war, evangelical Christians holding to the messianic faith became even more active in their support of Israel, with leading evangelists, such as Billy Graham, Hal Lindsey, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson, expressing their opinions that Israel was vital for the fulfillment of prophecy. Dozens of pro-Israel Christian organizations sprang up in the United States and elsewhere, with conservative evangelicals becoming Israel's most ardent supporters. Influenced by their messianic convictions, conservative evangelical politicians, such as former Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, supported Israel in Congress, advocating American financial and diplomatic backing for the Jewish State. Evangelical fascination with Israel expressed itself also in tours to the country, and, occasionally, in settling there. Since 1970, millions of conservative evangelicals came to Israel as tourists, volunteers to kibbutzim and archeological digs, or on missionary tours. Some settled in the country, expecting the Messiah to arrive. Interest in Israeli life and politics also increased immensely among this conservative segment of Christianity. But no aspect of Israeli religious, cultural, or political life fascinated evangelical Christian proponents of the Second Coming more than the prospect that the Jews would rebuild the Temple.

[14] After the Six-Day War, it seemed to Christians waiting for the imminent arrival of the Messiah that Israel held the territory on which the Temple could be rebuilt and the priestly sacrificial rituals reinstated, and so the dramatic developments of the war could finally lead humanity into the Messianic Age (Cox; Couch). The Temple, or rather its rebuilding, seemed to evangelical Christians to be the one development standing between this era and the next. A striking demonstration of the growing prominence of the Temple in Christian messianic thought can be found in Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, an evangelical bestseller translated into numerous languages, which sold about thirty million copies during the 1970s, and offered a measure of uniformity to the dispensationalist messianic vision during that period. Lindsey, like other premillennialist evangelicals, was strongly impressed by the Six Day War and its consequences, and placed Israel at the center of the eschatological drama (32-47). For him, the rebuilding of the Temple and the rise of Antichrist to power were major components of the Great Tribulation, without which the coming of the Messiah could not take place. There remained, however, a number of obstacles in the advancement of the prophetic timetable, the most striking of which were an insufficient interest in building the Temple among the Jews, and the Muslim mosques on the mountain.

[15] Dennis Rohan decided to change the existing reality. After spending some time as a volunteer in an Israeli kibbutz, he visited Jerusalem in July 1969 and there, convinced that God had designated him for that task, planned and burned the al-Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount in an attempt to secure the necessary ground for the building of the Temple. The mosque was damaged and Arabs in Jerusalem rioted. Rohan was arrested, tried, found insane, and sent to Australia to spend the rest of his life in an asylum. His was an act of one man, but a number of Christian premillennialist organizations, groups, and individuals since 1970 have openly promoted the building of the Temple through a variety of activities, most of them centered on helping Jews prepare for the recreation of the holy shrine.

Jews and Christians in Cooperation

[16] In the late 1970s and the 1980s, premillennialist Christians discovered groups of nationalist and Orthodox Jews interested in the building of the Temple. Such Jews, who were studying the Temple rituals, manufacturing utensils to be used for sacrificial purposes according to biblical or Talmudic measures, or trying to breed a new brand of heifers, served to sustain and excite the Christian messianic imagination. Christian premillennialists marveled at such groups and their activities, viewing them as “signs of the time,” indications that the current era was ending and the apocalyptic events of the End Times were coming near (cf. Jeffrey: 108-50). The Temple Institute, a museum and workshop in the Old City of Jerusalem that houses utensils and artifacts that a group of Jewish advocates of the building of the Temple reconstructed since the 1980s, has become a site of pilgrimage for Christian believers in the Second Coming. Christian visitors have been encouraged by the sight of Jews preparing the implements for use in the Third Temple, and the visits have served to enhance the faith in the imminent end of this era and the belief that the Rapture of the Church is about to take place very soon (see Stewart and Missler 1991a: 157-70).

[17] The relationship between Christian evangelicals and Jewish groups over the prospect of rebuilding the Temple has been one of the most unexpected developments in the long history of Jewish-Christian relations. For the most part, it has been a marriage of convenience. Christian supporters have perceived the Jewish groups as instrumental to the realization of the messianic age. In their vision, the rebuilt Temple is a necessary stage toward that goal. Similarly, Jewish proponents of the building of the Temple do not appreciate the Christian faith any more than Christian messianic groups appreciate the intrinsic value of the Jewish faith, but they see such details as being beside the point. The important thing for them has been the Christian willingness to support their work.

[18] The first to establish contacts between Christians and Jews interested in the building of the Temple was an English-speaking Israeli journalist. Born in South Africa, Stanley Goldfoot immigrated to Palestine in the 1930s, making his living as a journalist and businessman. During the 1940s, he was a member of Lechi, or, as the British called it, the Stern Gang, a radical underground organization that used terrorism as a means to force the British out of the country (on the Lechi, see Heller). He served as the group’s speaker and liaison for the foreign press. A secular Jew with artistic inclinations, Goldfoot advocated a right-wing outlook on Israeli politics in an English-language satirical magazine that he published in Tel Aviv in the 1960s and 1970s. After retiring, Goldfoot relocated to Jerusalem and established the Temple Foundation, operated from his handsome Jerusalem home, and

became, in the 1970s-1980s, the Israeli liaison for Christians advocating the rebuilding of the Temple (interview with Goldfoot, 12 November 1990). According to one source, Goldfoot was the one to establish the contacts, which became vital since the 1990s, between the Temple Mount Faithful and its Christian supporters (*Kol HaIr* 13 October 1995: 44-49). In the early 1980s, Chuck Smith, a noted evangelist and minister of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, one of the largest and most dynamic Charismatic churches in America (on Smith, see Miller), invited Stanley Goldfoot to lecture in his church, and Smith's followers helped to finance Goldfoot's activity. Chuck Smith's involvement in the rebuilding of the Temple is demonstrative of the constituency of Christians interested in the Temple and the prospect of its rebuilding. They are members and leaders of evangelical, mostly Charismatic, churches, situated at the center of conservative Protestant Christianity. Such people have influenced America's political agenda (see Liensch).

[19] Smith secured financial support for exploration of the exact site of the Temple. An associate of Smith, Lambert Dolphin, a California physicist and archeologist, took it upon himself to explore the Temple Mount (on Dolphin, see his extensive website at <http://www.Ldolphin.org>). An ardent premillennialist who believed that the building of the Temple was essential to the realization of messianic hopes, Dolphin was ready to use sophisticated technological devices and methods, such as wall-penetrating radar and seismic sounding, in his search for the ruins of the previous Temples. In both bringing his instruments into Israel and preparing to explore the Temple Mount, Dolphin worked in cooperation with and received help from Goldfoot. However, his attempts to research the Temple Mount to find conclusive evidence regarding the Temple's exact location have been frustrated by the Israeli police, who, confronted by Muslim protests, refused to allow the use of such devices on or under the Mount (Stewart and Missler 1991a: 157-70). Many Christians and Jews interested in the building of the Temple, such as Oz Hawkins, have not waited for conclusive findings by Dolphin. Relying on the work of an Israeli architect, Hawkins and others embraced the theory that the location of the Temple was between the two major mosques, al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock. The Temple, they concluded, could therefore be rebuilt without destroying the existing mosques, thus providing a "peaceful solution" to the problem of how to build the Temple at a site that is holy to the Muslims (see Hawkins). Christian proponents of building the Temple have not limited their efforts to discovering the exact site of the Temple. Some have searched for the lost Ark of the Covenant, adding a touch of adventure and mystery to a potentially explosive topic. The search for the "Lost Ark" has inspired a number of novels and a movie based in part on a real life figure (see Wead *et al.*; Stewart and Missler 1991b). Some premillennialist Christians have also searched for the ashes of the red heifer, which are necessary, according to the Jewish law, in order to allow Jews to enter the Temple Mount, while others have supported Jewish attempts at breeding red heifers or began breeding such heifers on their own (see Wright). A new interest has arisen in Christian evangelical circles in the Temple building, its interior plan, and its sacrificial works, as well as in the priestly garments and utensils. A number of books on these subjects have been published since 1970, and have enjoyed popularity in Christian premillennialist circles (see Sleming; Wead *et al.*; Ice and Price; Schmitt and Laney). The rebuilt Temple has also played an important role in evangelical novels, the most popular of which has been the book series *Left Behind*, which was published in the late 1990s and early

2000s and sold tens of millions of copies (LaHaye and Jenkins). The novels take place in the aftermath of the Rapture and describe the struggles and travails of non-Christians who would be “left behind.” One of their major challenges would be confronting the rise to power of the Antichrist. The series states the importance of the building of the Temple as part of the events that were to precede the arrival of the Messiah (LaHaye and Jenkins 1995: 415; 1996: 369; 1997: 208) and describes one of the Antichrist’s “achievements” in orchestrating the removal of the Temple Mount mosques to New Babylon (LaHaye and Jenkins 1997: 277). In the novels, the Western Wall in Jerusalem becomes the site of miraculous preaching of the Gospel.

[20] A working relationship between premillennialist Christians and the Temple Mount Faithful advanced more slowly than in the case of the Temple Foundation. Its exposure to the media notwithstanding, Gershon Solomon’s knowledge of English and his public relations skills could not match those of Stanley Goldfoot. Yet, by the early 1990s, Solomon had established good working relationship between his group and conservative evangelical Christians. Pat Robertson, the renowned leader of the 700 Club and a one-time presidential hopeful, offered his support and hospitality to Solomon. In August 1991, the 700 Club aired an interview with Solomon. Robertson described Solomon’s group as struggling to gain the rightful place on the Temple Mount. “We will never have peace,” Robertson declared, “until the Mount of the House of the Lord is restored” (quoted in Friedman: 144). Solomon, for his part, described his mission as embodying the promise for a universal redemption. “It’s not just a struggle for the Temple Mount, it’s a struggle for the . . . redemption of the world,” he declared (quoted in Friedman: 144-45). Examination of the mutual enchantment between evangelical Christians and Orthodox Jews, such as Robertson and Solomon, shows both sides to be on the charismatic side. Solomon, for example, claims to have divine revelations, not unlike those of prophets among evangelical charismatic Christians.

[21] The close relationship between Christian and Jewish proponents of building the Temple has brought some Christians to modify their understanding of the role of the Temple in their vision of the End Times. Initially, and as a rule today too, the Temple in Christian eschatological hopes is supposed to be the creation of Antichrist and has no real value from a Christian point of view, except as a stepping stone towards the arrival of the Messiah. According to that line of thinking, the Temple is nothing to look forward to, and is merely a necessary evil. However, as Jewish activists working toward the rebuilding of the Temple learned the details of the Christian eschatological scheme, they wondered about their Christian friends understanding of Jews as playing a dubious role as laborers in the service of the Antichrist. Christian writers and theologians, such as Randall Price, have reassured them that premillennialist Christians expect the Temple to survive the rule of Antichrist and to function gloriously in the millennial kingdom and not only in the period that precedes it (Ice and Price). In their *Left Behind* series, LaHaye and Jenkins have also changed the traditional dispensationalist understanding of the Antichrist. The Antichrist is neither a Jewish leader, nor the Pope – a more historical Protestant understanding of the Antichrist. Instead, their Antichrist is a Romanian Greek Orthodox, a move that seems to most readers of the novels to be a neutral but compelling option. He is Roman, perhaps, but neither a Catholic nor a Jew. The *Left Behind* series improves, in a moderate manner, on the conservative evangelical

image of the Jews. In the popular novels, Jews are well meaning but misguided people, many of whom lend their support to the Antichrist, at least for a while (see Ariel 2004).

[22] Jewish builders of the Temple have also changed their opinion on Christians. While Christians and Jews had initially cooperated with each other on a give and take basis and looked upon their relationship as a marriage of convenience, they have eventually warmed up to each other. Jewish Temple builders have been impressed by the keen interest and support of those Christians who were more interested in building the Temple than most Jews. The theology and message of Jewish builders, such as Solomon, has become increasingly universalistic and includes Christians as important participants in the divine drama of salvation. In a manner reminiscent of the attitudes of the contemporary Lubavitch group, Solomon has put a great premium on the traditional Jewish idea of the Naohide covenant. According to this line of thinking, since the days of Noah all of humanity is in covenant with God and is commended to follow elementary laws, such as “Thou shall not kill.” In relation to messianic expectations, such Jewish thinkers claim that Christians too have to strive and work towards the advancement of the messianic times (see Kaplan; Hanke). Significantly, the website of the Temple Mount Faithful (<http://www.templemountfaithful.org>) is entirely in English, as are all the group’s publications. Their readership is composed mainly of English-speaking Christians.

The Building of the Temple and Palestinian Muslims

[23] Christian hopes for the rebuilding of the Temple have affected premillennialist Christian views on Islam. Unlike their liberal Christian counterparts, who have taken part in a movement of interfaith dialogue in the later decades of the twentieth century and have come to respect all religious expressions, many conservative evangelicals perceive Islam as a misguided and hostile faith (see van der Hoeven 1990, 1993; Michas; Price; Davidson). The perception that Muslims stand in the way of the rebuilding of the Temple, and by extension, the messianic age, has not helped to improve the less-than-positive attitude that many Christian premillennialists have toward Islam. When the Soviet Union went through a process of liberalization in the late 1980s, providing new freedoms for the churches, some premillennialists began to question their old belief that Russia was the Northern Evil Empire, which, they believed, was destined to invade Israel and be defeated. During the Gulf War crisis, in the early 1990s, some premillennialists, including Lambert Dolphin, suggested that perhaps Saddam Hussein and Iraq were meant to fulfill that role (see Elson). Similar views were voiced in the 2000s about Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

[24] Since the 1970s, some Christian premillennialists have prayed to see the end of Muslim dominance on the Temple Mount. One such person, who has hoped that this rule would come to an end, has been Jan Willem van der Hoeven, a leader of Christian evangelical organizations that have aimed to muster Christian support for Israel (see Ariel 1997). In van der Hoeven’s understanding of history, the removal of the Temple Mount mosques and the rebuilding of the Temple will precede the arrival of the Messiah, and he has perceived the rise of extremist Muslim groups as rebellions against God. During the Gulf War, van der Hoeven prayed to God “to crush the power of Allah.” The Muslim’s God, he claimed, was merely a god that the Arabs had worshipped even before the rise of Islam. In his view, Islam is an idolatrous religion that has not recognized the divinity of the one almighty God of

Israel (see his 1990 sermon). The primarily Muslim allegiance of the Arab enemies of Israel and the Muslim opposition to both Jewish dominance of the Holy Land and the global power of the Christian West have contributed to van der Hoeven's negative perception of Islam, a religion that does not accept Jesus as savior.

[25] The Temple Mount mosques have symbolized for van der Hoeven and his comrades an idolatrous dominance of the sacred site on which the Temple should be rebuilt. In 1984, the International Christian Embassy, an evangelical organization, which van der Hoeven and others founded in 1980, planned a march of Christian pilgrims to the Temple Mount as part of the Tabernacles festival, which the ICEJ had organized in order to demonstrate that the site belongs to Christians and Jews and that true Christians yearn to see the Temple rebuilt. Teddy Kollek, the prestigious mayor of Jerusalem in the 1980s, was anxious to avoid inter-religious confrontations in Jerusalem and exercised his influence on the ICEJ's leaders, who canceled the march.

[26] While Christian proponents of the rebuilding of the Temple have not, as a rule, tried to pray on the Temple Mount, they have sympathized with Jews who have attempted to do so. When, in the mid 1980s, the Israeli police arrested members of the Temple Mount Faithful for trying to enter the Temple Mount and organize a prayer meeting there, Christian supporters were enraged. In their view, the State of Israel was acting against its true destiny, suppressing an activity that could lead to the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. Yet, Israel has no "First Amendment," and the police could deny individuals or groups worship or propagation of their ideas or agenda in public spaces. American evangelicals formed a "Committee of Concerned Evangelicals for the Freedom of Worship on the Temple Mount" and publicized their demands in leading American and Israeli newspapers, as well as approached members of Congress and asked them to intercede. In assessing the dangers and tensions embodied in the struggle for the Temple Mount, one needs to take into consideration not only the Messianic fervor of Jews and Christians, but also the strong feelings and determination of the local Muslim community and the support and sympathy of Arab Muslims worldwide. Ironically, as something of a symbiosis developed between Christian premillennialists and Jews wishing to see the Temple rebuild, so an adversarial symbiosis developed between Muslims and the Jewish and Christian Temple builders, the latter stirring strong negative reactions among the former, and offering them a strong focal point to galvanize for protest and war (cf. Zilberman).

[27] The explicit agenda of some Jewish and Christian groups who wish to change the status quo on the Temple Mount has served to fuel and enhance the Palestinian claim to the Haram al-Sharif. Since the 1970s, the Temple Mount has become a symbol of national liberation for Palestinian Muslims. The Mount with its mosques has been a sacred site for Muslims, especially in Palestine, even before the new enchantment that Jews and Christians have developed towards the Mount. In Jerusalem, Muslims announce their completion of a hajj to Mecca, by painting on the entrances to their homes pictures of the Haram al-Sharif with its mosques. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Palestinian movement of national liberation has become increasingly Muslim in its orientation, and its claim to the Haram al-Sharif more pronounced. Sovereignty over the Mount played a prominent part in the peace talks that took place between Palestinians and Israelis in the late 1990s, and caused a breakdown of the negotiations. The visit of Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount in

September 2000 served as the symbolic act for Palestinians to start the Second Intifada. As far as they are concerned, the Haram al-Sharif is an exclusively Muslim site and they have no wish to share it. Would-be builders of the Temple, peaceful or not, were intruders and had no claim on the holy site (Wasserstein: 226, 317-44; Reiter).

Jewish and Christian Attempts to Blow Up the Mosques

[28] Muslim fears were not unfounded. In the realities of the 1980s–2000s, Rohan’s attempt to burn the al-Aqsa mosque became a forgotten event. Most media and public attention focused on new Christian and Jewish radical groups. In the mid-1980s, the Israeli security services uncovered what soon became known as the Jewish Underground (“Ha Mahteret ha Yehudit”). The group consisted of religious nationalist settlers, disciples of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who were stocking illegal weapons and explosives. The group’s main agenda was to prepare a settlers army for the event of an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank or the Golan Heights. Members of the group were involved in acts of sabotage and a number of them were planning to blow up the Temple Mount mosques. The discovery of the group, whose members included leaders in the settlers’ community, sent shockwaves in the Israeli public at large and in the Orthodox community in particular. Members of the group were put on trial and sent to prison, and as a rule, in spite of disagreeing with the government’s policy of land for peace, no Jewish underground of such size has organized in Israel since. The discovery of the Jewish Underground enhanced the fear that a small but determined group of political extremists would succeed in blowing up the mosques. Members of the group were not crazy and, unlike Michael Rohan, had army training, including in handling explosives. Protecting the Temple Mount mosques became a priority for the Israeli security services (Inbari: 3).

[29] A number of other incidents have also demonstrated, since the 1980s, the potential dangers that Christian or Jewish groups might bring to the region by trying to destroy the Temple Mount mosques. In 1984, the Israeli police exposed and arrested another group that had planned to bomb the mosques on the Temple Mount, storing explosives and ammunition for that purpose. The group came to be known as the “Lifta Gang,” a name it received from its residence in a semi-abandoned Arab village on the western outskirts of Jerusalem. Israeli newspapers described a curious commune. Some of the members had criminal records or history of mental instability. According to one source, the group was associated with, and received assistance from, premillennialist Christians in America (Ledeem and Ledeem). The Lifta Gang was just as dangerous as the Jewish settlers who had planned at about the same time to blow up the mosques. Its weapon stockpile included American-made LAW shoulder-held missiles and a large amount of TNT. In the case of the Lifta Gang, messianic hopes came together with little regard for accepted social or legal restraints, either because of psychopathologies, or criminal or quasi-revolutionary tendencies. One could not help but wonder what would have happened if the group had not been caught before carrying out its plans. The Lifta Group’s potential for destruction notwithstanding, its existence was completely overshadowed by the discovery of the Jewish settler’s underground groups that had similar plans. As far as the public was concerned, it was a marginal group politically, socially, and religiously, and was soon forgotten.

[30] Even symbolic attempts to claim the Temple Mount as a Jewish site have had explosive consequences. The Temple Mount Faithful have repeatedly tried to enter the Temple Mount on Jewish festivals in order to conduct prayers. On Sukkot, the Feast of the Tabernacles, in October 1990, the Temple Mount Faithful planned, as they had done many times before, to enter the Temple Mount, but this time planned to lay a corner stone for the future Temple. The police did not allow them to enter the Temple Mount and they left the place. But Muslim worshipers on the Mount felt threatened. Incited by the muezzin, who broadcasted his sermon on loudspeakers on the Temple Mount, Muslims threw rocks at Jewish worshipers at the Western Wall below the platform of Temple Mount. The atmosphere became volatile, as Muslim demonstrators chased the small police unit off the platform, forcing units of the Israeli anti-riot police to storm the area a short while later. Dozens of demonstrators and police officers were killed or wounded (Landau: 160).

[31] The possibility that Christian and Jewish messianic hopes would bring about a mini-apocalypse gained momentum in the late 1990s. As the year 2000 approached, journalists, scholars, and government officials became preoccupied with the possible risks and dangers that this seemingly outstanding year might bring, and the approaching turn of the millennium stirred the messianic imagination. Many looked upon Y2K, an alleged global computer breakdown, as a potential catalyst of the apocalypse. Of special concern for those taking interest in the developments in the Middle East was the fate of the Temple Mount mosques. Should the mosques be bombed or seriously damaged through other means, all hell might break loose. This time the Israeli public and media targeted Christian protagonists of the Second Coming as potential troublemakers, and forgot, for a moment, that Jews too could come with similar schemes (see, for example, Ishai; Gaon). Israelis, as well as Americans, have shown unprecedented interest in the details of the Christian messianic scheme. Terms such as “the Rapture,” or “the Great Tribulation,” previously unknown outside evangelical circles, became in 1999 almost household names. In April 1999, Israeli Security rounded up members of a messianic group called Concerned Christians that had come to Jerusalem to take part in the events of the End Times and, according to official Israeli reports, to commit mass suicide, or perhaps to damage the mosques on the Temple Mount. Members of the group were consequently deported. Towards the latter months of 1999, Israeli fears that premillennialist Christians might try to blow up the mosques bordered on hysteria. Israeli security forces arrested and deported dozens of Christians, many seemingly harmless, who had come to Jerusalem and made it their home, hoping to witness the second coming of Jesus (Gorenberg 1999). Likewise, the Israeli government refused entrance to the country to “suspicious” Christians. The possibility of Christians bringing about a catastrophic event at the Temple Mount became very real to Israelis, and their fears in this respect concentrated on Christians instead of Jews.

[32] Since the 1990s, the peace negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the Oslo peace agreement, and the pullout from Gaza have caused alarm among Jewish settlers groups as well as among some premillennialist Christians. For most Christians and Jews expecting the Messianic Age, hopes for the rebuilding of the Temple remained just as strong as before (as expressed, for example, in the *Left Behind* series). However, one cannot tell what would happen if Israel gives up its official control of the Temple Mount. Some fear that such

a prospect might stir Jews and Christians to take drastic steps in an effort to “secure” the Jewish control of the mountain.

Conclusion

[33] The unique relationship that has developed between Jews and Christians over the prospect of the building of the Temple has brought about scenes that are almost imaginary, including Christians marveling at and receiving reassurance for their messianic faith from Jews who are studying the priestly codex in preparation for the reinstatement of the sacrificial system. Something of a symbiosis has developed between conservative evangelical Christians and Orthodox nationalist Jews over the building of the Temple. Although each of the groups has a different vision for the messianic times, they all share the same agenda for the near future. Accordingly, some Christians and Jews have formed historically unprecedented friendships and alliances, difficult to imagine at other times and places. There is, therefore, something almost surreal about the Christian and Jewish advocates of the building of the Temple, as their actions transcend the familiar historical dynamics of Jewish-Christian interaction. Perhaps not surprisingly, what started as a marriage of convenience turned along the way into a more affectionate relationship with both groups modifying their understanding of each other. This unexpected ménage between premillennialist Christian and Orthodox Jews has stirred Muslim jealousy and anger. An extended relationship developed with Palestinians looking at the Jewish-Christians’ enchantment with the Temple Mount as a reason to re-insist on their sovereignty in Jerusalem.

[34] The Jewish and Christian agendas of building the Temple have indeed played a part in the Palestinian negative reaction to Israeli presence on and even near the Haram al-Sharif, the Temple Mount (Goldberg; Gorenberg 2000). Therefore, the possibility that some Christians and Jews would engage in an almost surreal activity of trying to destroy the old Muslim mosques, in order to prepare the ground for the messianic age, has stirred concern among those observing the developments in Jerusalem. Unexpected and “unbelievable” situations do occur at times. In 1969, Rohan’s act was unique, but since then, the Jewish and Christian fascination with the idea of rebuilding the Temple has grown and in the 1980s a number of groups made actual plans for destroying the mosques. Granted, most Christian and Jews committed to the idea of building the Temple are law-abiding and would not contribute to terrorist acts. But Christians and Jews are not the only ones making claims to the Mountain. Muslims have turned the Haram al-Sharif into a symbol of their title to Palestine and are passionately committed to defending it. Fears that nationalist Jews or Christian premillennialists would become involved in a plot to bomb the mosques relates to the extreme margins of the movements. Such concerns are, however, only too real. What happens if Israeli or Palestinian security forces fail to detect plots to blow up the mosques in time? Will a local doomsday then begin in Jerusalem?

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